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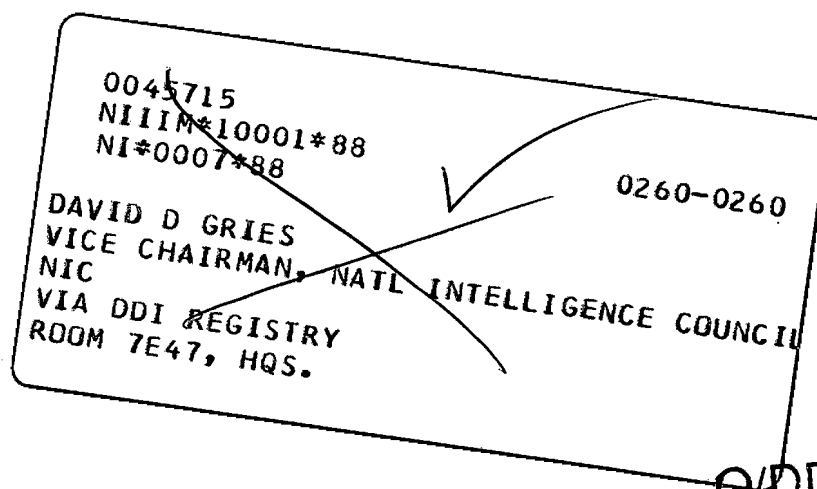
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# Soviet Forces and Capabilities in the Northwestern Theater of Military Operations

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Interagency Intelligence Memorandum



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NI IM 88-10001CX

May 1988

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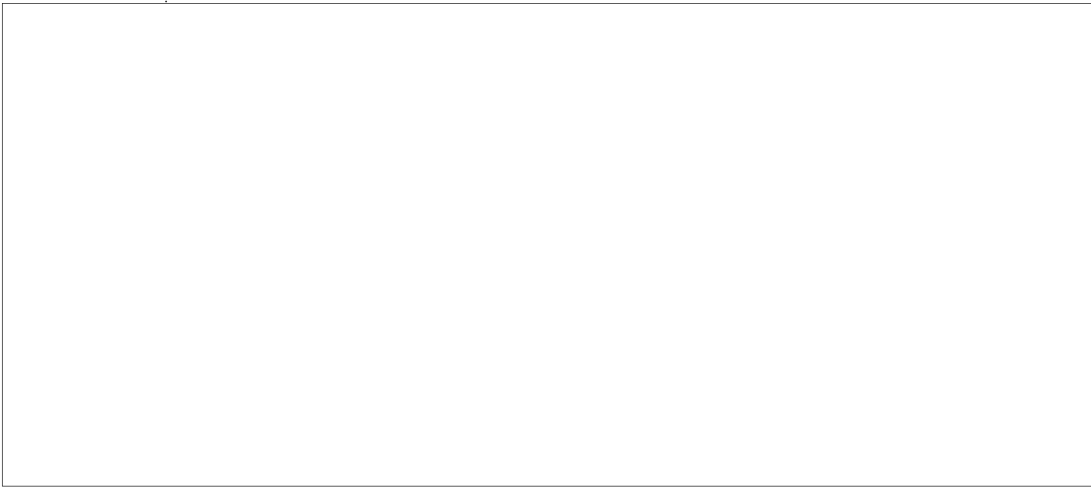
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**SOVIET FORCES AND CAPABILITIES  
IN THE NORTHWESTERN THEATER  
OF MILITARY OPERATIONS**

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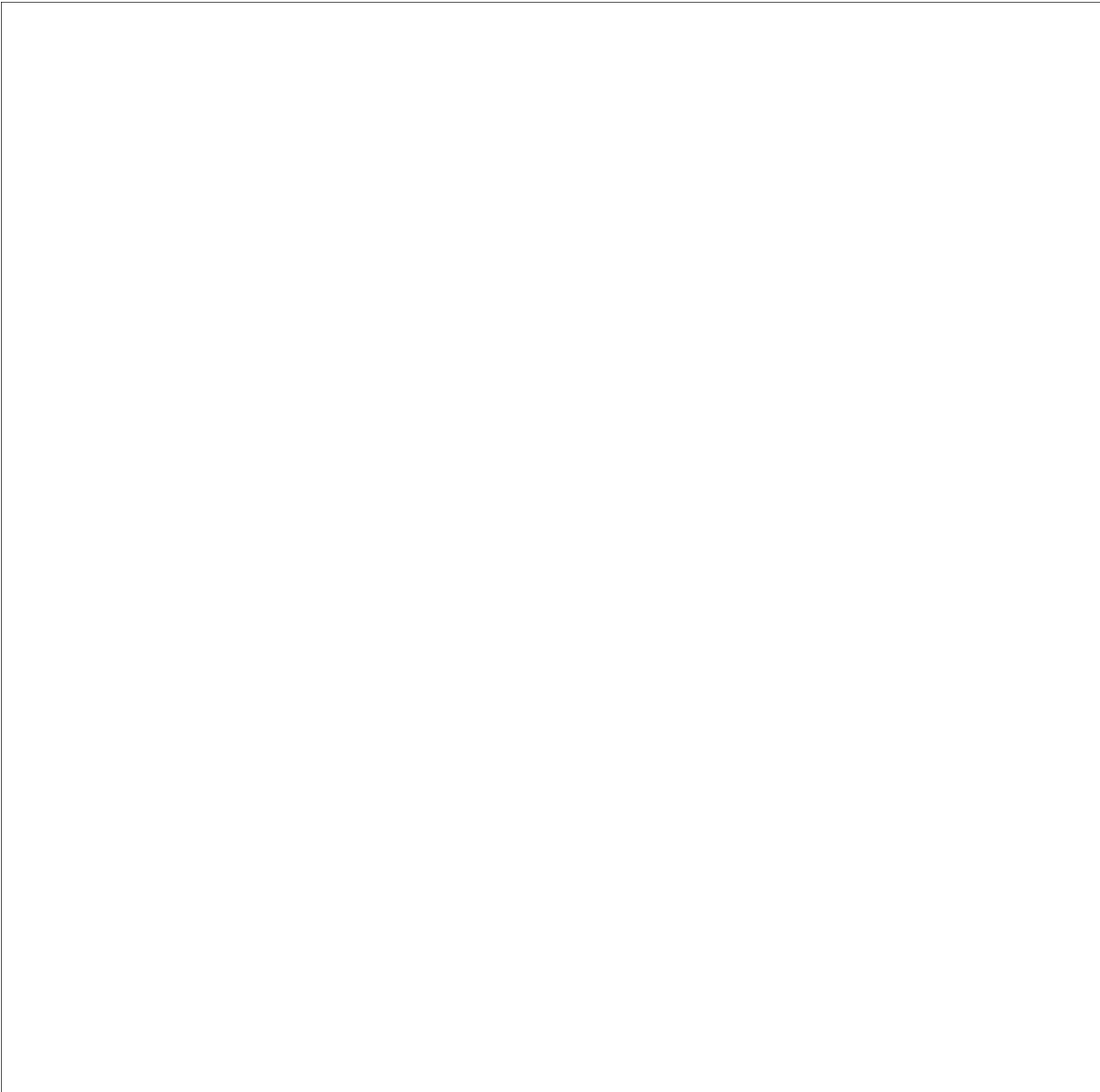
Information available as of 17 March 1988 was used in the preparation of this Memorandum, approved for publication on 17 March 1988 by the Acting Chairman of the National Intelligence Council.

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SCOPE NOTE

This Interagency Intelligence Memorandum examines Soviet naval, air, air defense, and ground forces that are expected to be active in the event of war in the Northwestern Theater of Military Operations (TMO), assesses their capability to conduct wartime operations, and estimates how the Soviets would try to deploy and use them. The timeframe for this Memorandum corresponds to the force projections in NIE 11-14-85, *Trends and Developments in Warsaw Pact Theater Forces, 1985-2000*. The projections herein represent the Intelligence Community's analysis of the likely outcome of the USSR's general purpose forces development. Near-term projections (through 1990) are based on events now occurring in the forces. Mid-term (through 1995) and long-term (through 2000) estimates are based on Soviet weapons now under development, anticipated changes in rates of production, and an assessment of the likely results of current Soviet research and development efforts. There is less confidence in the accuracy of our long-term projections.

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This Memorandum has been coordinated with the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organizations of the Marine Corps and the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and Air Force.

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This Memorandum was produced under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces

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**Figure 1**  
**Selected Soviet Force Headquarters in the Northwestern TMO**



The United States Government has not recognized the incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet Union. Other boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

The northern region of Europe is viewed by the Soviet leadership as a vital area within which several strategic operations would take place in the event of war. Soviet forces in the Northwestern Theater of Military Operations (TMO) are organized for a variety of missions:

- Defense against NATO air-, sea-, and land-based nuclear and conventional strikes directed at those Soviet strategic forces located in the region. A primary objective of Soviet forces stationed in the Northwestern TMO is to protect Soviet nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine forces (and their support facilities) operating in Northern Fleet waters.
- Defense against strategic offensives into the depth of the Soviet homeland through this theater. Soviet naval, air, and air defense forces in the Northwestern TMO are intended to defend against NATO carrier-based air forces, as well as sea- and air-launched cruise missiles.
- The generation of ground, air defense, air, and naval forces to undertake operations in the Barents and Norwegian Seas and in Finland and Norway. A primary Soviet objective in this theater is to gain control of facilities of northern Norway, particularly airfields and local ports.

We judge *frontal*<sup>1</sup> operations in the Northwestern TMO to be secondary to those of the Western TMO in Soviet planning.

The USSR intends to use facilities in Finland for operations against Norway. Although we believe the Soviets would be reluctant to widen a conflict in Scandinavia by an unprovoked attack on Sweden, they would probably include Swedish airspace in their air defense umbrella.

Although the Northern Fleet is the most powerful of the Soviet fleets—with 60 percent of the strategic submarine force—not all of the naval forces assigned to this fleet are intended to operate within the Northwestern TMO. Soviet naval operations within this theater will focus on direct support to ground forces operations, support to the nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine force, strikes against Western naval forces, and coastal defense. We estimate that the USSR will

<sup>1</sup> Although not directly comparable to any Western organization, a *front* would be similar to a NATO army group and its associated air forces in size, level of command, and function. There is no standard organization for a *front*. This term will be italicized throughout the Memorandum.

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engage in offensive mining operations along the Norwegian littoral. We also expect the Northern Fleet Air Force to expand and modernize during the next 10 years.

Soviet ground forces in the Northwestern TMO have undergone steady improvement since the mid-1970s. The Soviets have tailored their equipment and training to the requirements of the severe environment of this theater. Nonetheless, major offensive ground operations would require a lengthy force generation process that would include moving the majority of the ground forces onto the Kola Peninsula.

The counter-air operation is key to achieving the main missions of the Soviet forces in the Northwestern TMO. The Soviets have significantly improved air defense in this theater by integrating all air defense forces within the TMO, by introducing the latest aircraft and surface-to-air missiles into the air defense forces of the theater, by developing midair refueling capabilities for their newest fighters, and by incorporating warning and control aircraft into their air defense forces. The Soviets have also improved their capability to interdict Norway's northern airfields.

For the present within the Northwestern TMO, large-scale operations would most likely be directed by the General Staff. For example, an Independent Air Defense Army headquartered at Leningrad and another at Arkhangel'sk are under the direct control of Moscow.

The correlation of nuclear and chemical forces in the Northwestern TMO is in the Soviets' favor.

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